HER SACRIFICE

SYNOPSIS

Attracted by the good looks and wealth of Sedgewick Morris as well as a desire to be in a position to help her mother and sister, Geraldine Rhodes marries Morris only to find her life most unhappy owing to her husbands unconquerable craving for drink. "Gerry" as she is called for short, writes a book based upon her own life and experiences, calling it "Her Sacrifice." She submits it to a publisher without giving her name but later allows them to know it is her own work. Mr. Merrol, the publisher, is very friendly and attentive to Geraldine, not knowing that she is Mrs. Morris, and she struggles between her desire for true friendship and her duty to her worthless husband

CHAPTER IV.

A Crisis

The following afternoon young Merrol met her riding in the park. In spite of his great surprise at the sight of her she realized that he probably conducted a wide-spread search of the bridle-paths before he had come upon her. And she scowled disapprovingly.

"Is this the way you keep compacts?" she asked.

He looked offended.

"Didn't we expect chance meetings?"

"Do you mean to consider this a chance meeting?"

"I ride in the park; I meet you," he said, falling beside her. "Was I sure of meeting you? Did I know what time you would ride or whether you would ride at all? You didn't yesterday.

"Yesterday was wretched; to-day is fine." She looked at his mount. "How long have you been riding?"

"Some time," he admitted innocently.

"So I should judge.'

He smiled at her engagingly.

"I'll go you through the park and up the drive to Clermont for tea."

"You'll turn right around and leave me."

"Leave you?" he cried, astonished.

"After carefully meeting you accidentally? After our compact?"

She smiled.

He did sit a horse beautifully, and he looked exceptionally well in riding things. She decided to take him up and seize the opportunity, over tea, to explain that she had misled him and that she was Sedgewich Morris's wife.

"Very well," she said; "I'll go you. But there are to be no more accidental meetings in the park hereafter. Now you know what time I ride, and if you meet me it will be by design."

"You are the hardest girl to know I've ever met," he answered, aggrieved. "There's no pleasing you."

"You are absolved of trying," said she.

He made no answer, so after waiting an instant she guided her horse into a canter, and they went briskly, Gerry in front, young Merrol close behind her.

The air was crisp, dry, cold. The sun was shining. The ground was white with yesterday's snow. They followed the path to the Seventy-Second Street entrance and crossed o the drive. It was colder there—a sharp wind blowing in from the river.

They quickened their gait, making Clermont in good time, both in a glow from the run. A table overlooking the river was made ready for them, and they ordered tea.

"You are infinitely lovelier with color in your cheeks," he said meditatively.

"Do you make a habit of saying such things to women so bluntly?" she asked curiously.

"To be quite truthful, yes. I notice they're usually more pleased than offended," he answered frankly. "But I don't always mean them. I meant that."

"Indeed! And am I more pleased than offended, do you think?"

"Yes," he answered calmly; "I do think you are."

She smiled at him, amused.

"What makes you think so?"

"There are lightning flashes in your eyes when you are angry. There aren't any now. They are all soft and deep and mysterous—like a stormy sky.'

"Your impetuous, imprudent tongue will get you into trouble some day," she said.

"Don't you believe in telling the truth?" he asked.

"Yes; but there's no reason why you should say things better left unsaid."

"Why are they better left unsaid? Don't you know what the craving for expression is? It is the rule of life."

"I thought you wanted to be my friend?" she said.

"I am your friend."

"Friends waste no time in the exchange of flattery."

"I wasn't flattering."

"Nonsense!" she cried. "My eyes are not like stormy heavens. Thank the Lord they aren't. They're like eyes. They're just gray eyes—a little large, perhaps, and rather expressive. But there is nothing like storm-clouds about them."

"That was poetic license."

"Well, please don't indulge in poetic license at my expense," she protested, smiling. "You wouldn't feel at all pleased if I were to compare your eyes with the delft china tea-cups—although they are almost the same shade of blue."

"If you'll only notice my eyes, you can compare them to anything you like."

"The sun is lovely on the water," said she.

She couldn't muster up courage enough to tell him the truth. It seemed such an odd thing to say outright: "I'm not Miss Rhodes; I'm Mrs. Morris. "I've been misleading you. That's why you mustn't say such things to me.' She couldn't do it. She wished she had worn her wedding-ring. Then he might question, and the subject could come up naturally. That idea pleased her. She would keep him off to-day, and the next time she would wear her wedding-ring.

The sun is lovely on the water," he admitted. "It always is, and it nearly always looks the same. Oh I'd rather look at you. To-morrow I can see the sun on the water. I can see it almost any time. But it is an event when I have an opportunity of looking at you."

"Hunger has made you light-headed," she protested.

"Nay, I have been blond since a child!"

"Help!" she cried, and hastened to fix his tea as the waiter brought it.

"I like having tea with you," he said. "It makes me feel domestic and cozy and comfortable and worth while. If I were making worlds, I'd make little ones—just big enough to hold two people; and I'd put the right two together in each world."

"In that case," said she, "you would be deprived of the pleasure of having tea with me, and I should be relieved of the necessity of shooing you off continually. Now don't protest. I'll have an end to this sort of talk! I will, I swear, if I have to hold my ears and shut my eyes and repeat the alphabet a hundred times. Will you stop it?"

"What?"

"Paying me compliments and saying flatering things to me and—insinuating."

"I think much more than I venture to say."

"You can think what you please—and talk commonplace."

"Very well," he sighed. "I won't talk commonplaces; but I'll talk impersonally. Will that serve?"

She distrusted his guiless look.

"I'll soon tell you if it won't."

"There is no pleasing you," he lamented. "Do you believe in love?"

"Love is a subject taboo," said she calmly.

"There's no pleasing you. You select subjects.

"Horses," said she at random.

"When I am married—" he began.

"I didn't say anything about marriage."

"You might let me finish. When I am married I am going to keep horses and ride every morning in the country lanes with my lovely young wife."

She grinned derisively.

"Elephants."

"We shall live in the country, and when we are bored with the country we'll go to India and ride elephants—my wife and I. She—"

"Elephants," reminded Gerry.

"She won't keep me talking of elephants. She'll like me to say nice things—"

"Elephants!"

"—to her as we ride through the jungle.That's all I know about elephants, except that they have four feet, a trunk, two tusks, big ears, lile eyes, and eat straw and peanuts!"

"Talk about food."

"Food," said he pleasantly, "reminds me of you, because it revives my fainting spirit and makes life possible."

Her color mounted.

"Don't talk at all," she said in a harassed voice.

So they sat there in silence, finishing their tea. Contentedly he bit into sandwiches, sipped tea, munched macaroons. His eyes rested on her. She looked at the river at the Palisades, at motor-cars passing, at her plate, and ingnored his fixed regard.

They did not speak as he paid the check. They did not speak as they mounted and started down the drive. But at the door of her house he held out his hand, meekly dumb.

"Good-by," he sighed.

"Good-by," he said. "It would be rude not to reply to a lady. But I'd rather say anything else to you. I hate to say good-by to you."

"You needn't again. Perhaps that opportunity won't arise."

"It will," he said confidentially, "sooner or later. Bear me in mind if you're lonely or blue."

She made no answer, ascended the the steps, and entered as the footman opened the door. He stood motionlessly until she had completely disappeared. Then he mounted again listlessly and rode away.

She was determined that she would not see him again. It was definitely settled in her mind. And from this instant she would wear her wedding-ring, so that in case their paths should cross accidentially he would be undeceived.

Bravely she put it on that night for dinner, but it annoyed her. She never wore rings, except on dress occasions. She liked to feel her fingers free. She considered rings a nuisance—a needless weight. Still, she wore the gold band resignedly.

It was not an ordinary ring. It had diamonds sunk deep in it at intervals all the way round. Morris had wanted to give her something a little out of the beaten track, so he had tabooed the plain gold band.

That night he appeared at dinner—pale, silent, morose. While the servants were in the room he scarsely spoke. When the door had closed behind them Gerry spoke first, disposing of the matter of his fall from grace, eliminating the necessity of a scene. They were beginning to be unbearable, those scenes.

"I forgive you, Sedge," she announced calmly; "and I'm not going to leave you, and I'll give you another chance. So pull yourself together and let's forget as quickly as possible that it happened."

He was taken by surprise. His mien was that of a disappointed child.

"You're a brick, Gerry," he said. "Some day I'm going to win. Only don't lose patience. I thought I was strong enough to stop when I'd enough—but I didn't know I'd had enough. It's been a valuable lesson to me. After this, not a drop—under any circumstances. I'm resolved."

She nodded.

"You're killing yourself. You're a slave to the stuff. You've practically ruined your career. You've alienated me. Is it worth while?"

"No," he said. "It isn't, I'm going to stop. I'm still master of myself. You'll see. As long as I live you'll never see. me in that condition again. That is certain. You can bank on it."

To look at his eager, resolute face, you would have been moved to believe him. But Gerry had seen the same expression innumerable times — the day after a debauch.

She was not impressed; but she thought to strengthen his purpose by pretending to be. Alternately she tried two plans. Sometimes she pretended to believe in him. Somtimes she thought to compel him to live up to his word by scornfully discrediting it.

"I know you can win out if you only determine to," she said. "You'd better begin those walks again."

"I will. I wish the spring would come. I feel the cold so terribly. I will enjoy walking in the spring."

"It's pleasanter," she admitted.

"And we'll open the Greenery—and live in the air down there!"

She remembered a month at the Greenery the summer after she was married. The house had been full of guests, and an ocean of drinkables had gone. She remembered her own wretched loneliness among Sedge's friends—and she scowled.

It occurred to her that many, many more years of this life were in store for her, unless the book panned out well—exceptionally well. Then she would be free to leave this bit of wreckage across the table. It would seem, in a way, like deserting a child—for he depended on her, feared her, needed her.

But she felt herself in no way responsible. He had not betrayed his weakness before his marriage. She had been misled. And she had tried to help him pull himself up; but it was impossible. And she didn't love him. She must admire a man—respect a man—in order to love him. She could neither admire nor respect him. And she was young—and alive. She wanted to live.

Until Merrol's assurance that her book would make a great deal of money she had not considered divorce. She could not consider it—with Agnes and Scott and her mother to look out for, for she could not consent to take alimony. She could not. The very thought seemed degrading.

It was enough to ask for freedom again after her promise to love, honor, and obey him for all time unto eternity. But she had made that promise to the man she thought he was—not to him. She did not know him before her marriage. His charm dazzled her. His wealth appealed to her imagination.

His wooing—the appealing poetry of it—blinded her eyes, confused her judgement. She had been only seventeen then, and her mother and Agnes had been overwhelmed with pride and awe at the greatness of the honor.

Surely it was no wonder she had erred.

And unpleasant as this realization was, the realization that she was unable to rectify the error was harder to endure. Her instinct had been to leave him; but her duty to her family interfered. So she sacrificed herself—all the sweetness and fineness and enthusiasm dying in her.

Her hands were tied. Her mother was absolutely and entirely dependent upon her, or upon Sedge. He had made her, a splendid allowance, which enabled her to live comfortably—even luxuriously. She had such a hard time before.

To deprive her of this would have been heartless cruelty, for she was a doll-woman—a simple, helpless, vague sort of woman. She had married Gerry's father—a novelist of note—under the conviction that he was wealthy. And she had struggled all through her married life with domestic problems and economic problems far above her.

Then Agnes took the helm. She taught music. Her ambition — her father's ambition—had been the concert stage for her; but stern necessity intervened. She stopped studying and began to teach. After her father's death she supported the family.

Gerry had been too young then to earn much, although she had picked up occasional quarters, delivering bundles for a near-by milliner. Scott had been too young to do that much, and, anyway, Agnes insisted upon keeping both the younger children at school.

Gerry's marriage had been a miracle of relief to Agnes, for Gerry had explained the situation to Sedge, and he had generously insisted that Agnes go on with her studies. Scott had been sent to an expensive school—a military school, where he might grow more robust.

This tower of burdens rested upon Gerry now. The comfort of all three depended upon her living on with Sedge. She faced this problem the fifth time he had broken his word to her—and decided to sacrifice herself.

Until young Merrol had spoken of the money her book would make, Gerry had not considered the possibility of becoming a wage earner. Even in writing the book she had followed a natural craving for expression, rather than a desire for fame or fortune.

Sitting opposite Sedge, her eyes wandering critically over him, she wondered how much longer it would be before she could declare herself free. And his eyes, fixed mournfully on his plate, lifted and found something strange in her expression—something burning, restless, fretting.

"Gerry!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Yes?" She met his glance. Her expression altered.

"What were you thinking?" he asked tremously.

"Nothing I want to talk about," she answered.

Terror dawned in his dark eyes. He caught his breath.

"You're not going back on me?"

"Not this time. I told you I'd give you another chance."

He leaned over eagerly and patted her hand.

"That's a good pal," he cried. "This time I'm going to make good. And we'll be happy together again. We'll be like we were at first. You know, dear!"

She flushed and withdrew her hand.

"Some time," she said, "there will be a last chance, and if you fail then it will be the end. Try hard, Sedge!"

"I'll succeed this time," he said. "Why, I can't help succeeding, dear. I couldn't lose you. I've only to stop drinking. I can. Wait and see."

"I'm waiting," she answered patiently. "I've been waiting a year."

They did not go out that night. They sat in the music-room, and he made her play "Beauty's Eyes" and "I Love You," and he sang them—softly, because his voice was still a little off, as it always was after an attack. He had a pleasant baritone.

Afterward he had drawn her down beside him on the couch, and had told her how he meant to settle down to business, and how he would land a diplomatic appointment, and how they would go abroad to one of the foreign courts, and she should shine among the nobles.

Once such fairy tales absorbed her. He had a convincing, persuasive manner; but she had learned to separate possibilities from facts. She had lost her desire to shine at foreign courts. She had lost her interest in kings and queens. But she listened quietly, and nodded and sighed and broke in now and then with; "Yes, I hope so, Sedge; I hope so."

"You shall see!" he cried confidently. "I've been wasting my opportunities and ruining my health. I've been ignoring my talents and making you suffer. But that's all ended at last, dear. To-night we start again!"

"Yes," she said, nodding.

But she knew quite well that it was too late, at last.

Young Merrol did not turn up the next day, nor the next, nor the next. She was surprised. She had taken him to be the sort of person who would persist.

She had expected him to invent new ways of seeing her and being with her. In a way she had hoped he would, for she was very lonely, and he had a way of bringing back the girl that Sedge had destroyed—a pleasanter Geraldine.

But she was glad to be saved the necessity of explaining her deception—glad that his fancy for her had not been serious. This she kept telling herself fiercely, for there had come into her head a temptation to continue the deception until she could be free of Sedge. This evil thought—popping into her head from nowhere—horrified her.

She told herself that she was not a good girl—married to one man and thinking always of another. The fact that she pitied and despised and loathed the man to whom she was married was, in her eyes, no excuse. She owed him loyalty so long as she was his wife. And to think of another man so constantly—to wish for his presence always—was unworthy of her. She wept over this. In secret she lashed herself with thoughts that hurt.

She rode in the park, and looked at each turn in the road for him. Each morning her letters were examined with eagerness. Every ring at the door bell and telephone suspended her breathing for an instant.

A week went by.

Then came a box of flowers, addressed to Miss Rhodes and bearing no card. They were common garden flowers. How he had gotten them at this time of the year was a tantalizing mystery. Mignonette, sweet-peas,, pink, marigolds, garanium, pansies—a strange assortment, speaking of spring and the country, and warm sunshine and still summer afternoons, and birds and crickets and frogs.

She buried her face in them and cried a little, because she was glad he associated her with such blossoms as these. But though this mute appeal pleased her she would not send for him, would not answer at all, so that he might have no excuse for coming, or for remembering her existence. She told herself that if she must have wicked thoughts and impulses, at least she need not act upon them.

So a second week went slowly by. Sedge was still doggedly walking in the mornings, but he had abandoned the afternoon rides. Save for theatre and opera and concerts with Agnes, they went nowhere.

He had begun to angle again for the diplomatic appointment. Once or twice men who were helping him had been to dine, and proudly he had refused wine. But Gerry felt that his enemy was only waiting—and watching.

In the middle of the third week he was called to Washington, and Gerry was left alone. Agnes was practising many hours a day in preparation for her appearance at a fashionable musical.

To Be Continued.

A Mid-sea Dilemma

By A. H. MORINO.

It was on an unusually warm and almost windless day in March that the second-class battleship Oklahoma came upon the gunboat Seattle steering wildly about in mid-ocean, with a weird tale of woe fluttering from her signal halyards. "Snake Loose. Help!" was the startling message of the flags. As if to emphasize the urgency of the need, this appeal was supplemented by no less that five inverted ensigns stuck all over the rigging.

The captain of the Oklahoma was nonplussed. What sort of help could he offer in a case of this kind? He was no snake-charmer, he said. What the Seattle probably needed was a bunch of temperance tracts or, better yet, a package of blank pledges. Nevertheless, a boat was lowered and a crew of jackies sent over to investigate and render what assistance they could.

When Mr. Hennessy, the lieutenant in charge, boarded the distressed gunboat, he was more puzzled than ever. What seemed to be an entire crew was gathered in little groups on the deck, all staring at a huge snake—a python—which was calmly basking in the warm sunlight on a cleared part of the deck. Deep anxiety and even fear was plainly visible on every face, yet they showed no hostility toward the reptile—they simply watched it very closely. Captain Simmons, who commanded the gunboat, received the lieutenant with evident relief, and quickly made him acquainted with the situation in which they were placed.

It seemed that the Seattle, on her way from Montevideo to New York, had taken on board a live specimen of a rare species of boa or python, found only in the valley of the Rio de la Plata. It had been captured for the New York zoo, but before finding a permanent home in the snake house there, it was going for a short stay at the Smithsonian institution. The boa at first had been rather sluggish, taking but a languid interest in its surroundings, and had given them little trouble. Later, however, the sea air or the motion of the vessel had aroused it, and finally it had managed to break out of its case and roam around at will. Fortunately, it seemed to be in a very peaceful mood and had not yet offered to attack anyone without provocation.

"The python, I beleve, is not a poisonous snake," remarked Lieutenant Hennessy. "If enough of you pile on, you can easily secure it and put it back into its cage without any danger. I don't see that you need any help from us."

The captain smiled a mirthless, sickly smile. "You don't know what you're talking about," he said. "You haven't heard the whole story yet. We can't handle it roughly. Why, man! that snake is a regular mine! It's full of dynamite!"

"Dynamite!" exclaimed the lieutenant, "why, where could it get dynamite?"

"It was some we were using to kill sharks," explained the captain. "We attached the dynamite to a wire connected with an electric battery, baited it with a piece of salt pork—"

"I see," said the lieutenant. "So the snake swallowed some of the dynamite, eh?" He eyed the basking reptile thoughtfully. What was to be done? Though still a young man, he was not without many years of experience at sea. On board the Oklahoma he was looked up to by all as a man of much ingenuity and many expedients, yet here was a nut that seemed to be hard for him to crack.

"Have you tried to chloroform it?" he asked suddenly. A wild hope dawned for a moment in the captain's eye and as quickly died out again; he shook his head mournfully. "No," he said, "but it won't let us get near enough to try it. We thought of shoving it gently on to a piece of sea-cloth and then pulling the whole business overboard, but as soon as any of us came near it began to slam around on the deck—" He shuddered at the thought of what might have happened. "Besides, I don't think we have any chloroform."

"Anyway, it might have hit on the side of the ship and exploded," commented the lieutenant. "That would have been just as bad as on deck. I've an idea, though. If you could find out where the snake's stomach is loc—"

But he never told his plan, whatever it was. Something happened just then that held him and everybody else spellbound with excitement The big snake leisurely uncoiled itself and glided to the side railing Everyone held his breath as it crawled down the rope ladder and landed in the bottom of the Oklahoma's boat with a little thump that sent every man's heart into his mouth. Captain Simmons wiped the perspiration from his brow and looked at the lieutenant. The lieutenant looked at the captain. "It's our boat," he said uneasily, but the captain gave no heed. He walked over to the side where the snake had disappeared, and as he leaned on the railing, he sawed with his pocket knife at the rope holding the boat fast, till it parted. As the little dancing cockle-shell floated off with it dangerous passenger, a unanimous sigh of relief rose involuntarily from the crew of the Seattle.

But the lieutenant did not look very happy. He was still more perturbed when Captain Simmons suddenly disappeared into his cabin and emerged with a rifle, into which he smilingly slipping a shell. "Can't be helped," he replied to the remonstrating lieutenant, as he carefully aimed at the now distant boat, "the navy regulations direct us to destroy all floating mines and other things likely to prove a menace to navigation." He pulled the trigger, and a miniature water-spout off in the distance greatly mystified the watching officers of the Oklahoma.

"I wonder why it is," said Fanny Richards to her cousin, as they were returning from their trip to the Brooklyn navy yard, "that the Oklahoma has one boat marked Seattle. Is that where it was made?"

You can't convince the owner of a small automobile that a big one is worth the money it costs.

Toadstools are often mistaken for mushrooms, just as gall is frequently mistaken for genius.

Sad Indeed.

A Boston school teacher had read Whittier's "Maud Muller" to her pupils, and at the close of her reading spoke of the sorrowful significance of the words "It might have been." She asked the boys and girls if they could think of any four sadder words. One alert youngster of a dozen years held up his hand and said:

"I know two sadder words."

"What are they?" asked the teacher.

"Please remit."